

MICHAEL VAN VALKENBURGH ASSOCIATES



THE LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE FIRM AWARD SUBMITTAL

**Duke University**  
**Office of the University Architect**  
BOX 90149  
DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA  
27708-0149

300 FULLER STREET, SUITE 300  
DURHAM, NC 27701

TELEPHONE (919) 682-6066  
FAX (919) 683-5354

ASLA Board of Trustees  
c/o Carolyn Mitchell  
American Society of Landscape Architects  
636 Eye St., NW  
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Nomination of Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates for Firm of the Year

Dear Trustees,

The list of winners of ASLA's Landscape Architecture Firm Award is stacked with firms that have produced significant work and made great contributions to our profession. As impressive as it is, however, the list remains glaringly incomplete, as it fails to recognize one of our most accomplished firms: Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates (MVVA). As a collective of talented designers and thinkers, MVVA has produced three decades worth of exceptional, groundbreaking built work, been a leader in promoting innovative responses to environmental challenges, and significantly raised awareness of the important work we do as landscape architects. It is because of this that I enthusiastically nominate MVVA for the Landscape Architecture Firm Award.

Michael Van Valkenburgh, FASLA, opened MVVA in 1982. As we all know, he has built a career as one of only a handful of landscape architects with name recognition extending far outside of our profession. His accomplishments and contributions have been recognized with many awards, including the ASLA Design Medal and induction into the prestigious American Academy of Arts and Sciences. His is the public face for the firm, and the name on the letterhead, but he is far from the only person involved.

Van Valkenburgh leads the firm with Laura Solano, ASLA and Matthew Urbanski, ASLA, who have been involved in most of the firm's major projects, along with other principals Paul Seck, ASLA, and Gullivar Shepard, ASLA. Together they direct a staff of over 80 people whose diverse backgrounds and educations enable the firm to tackle very complex projects and successfully lead large multidisciplinary teams - something that has benefitted all landscape architects.

The list of amazing projects created by MVVA is too long to go into here. Needless to say, it includes many award winning parks, campuses, residences, and urban spaces, all conveying the firm's gift for creating beautiful, innovative, and horticulturally rich landscapes that respond to a given site's ecology, culture and context.

Brooklyn Bridge Park in New York City, which the firm has been involved with since 2003, is perhaps the most comprehensive, complex and transformative urban park undertaken in this country over the past century. The

multi-phase project is being enjoyed by those New Yorkers in a constant search for new quality open space. What impresses me most about the park is that it is not a pretentious or self-conscious presentation of overwrought design. Instead, it has a roughness to it, an authenticity built out of sturdy detailing and solid construction that gives it a rustic, yet sophisticated beauty that will likely prove to be timeless – exactly what our urban parks need. The careful and ingenious reuse of materials found on site exemplifies for me the thoughtful approach to design the firm takes, one that truly sets it apart.

During the aftermath of Superstorm Sandy's destructive path across the NYC area in 2012, the success of the complex stormwater system MVVA's team designed for Brooklyn Bridge Park became a celebrated model for coastal ecological planning and design. It also became a well-documented example showing the role landscape architects play in dealing with the increasingly apparent damage being caused by climate change. This has been significant for our profession, and MVVA deserves a good deal of the credit for that.

The past couple of years have proven that the firm is far from slowing down and, I would argue, still producing its best work. The impact the work MVVA continues to have on the ongoing urban renaissance being experienced across the country is astounding. The celebrated openings of Maggie Daley Park and the 606 in Chicago are prime examples of this. The brilliance of the 606, and its centerpiece - the Bloomingdale Trail - lies in the understated work of confident designers not afraid to let stripped-down infrastructure be the star, without adding unnecessary artifice. Maggie Daley Park, on the other hand, is a whimsical, technically complex wonderland for Chicago kids of all ages, presented with a boldness and bravery not seen nearly enough in playground design. As the world's eyes have been turned toward the transformation of Chicago's public realm, these projects have significantly raised the profile of the role landscape architects play in improving our cities.

While I believe MVVA is more than deserving of this honor based on project work alone, its impact and influence on our profession extend well beyond that. Van Valkenburgh, Solano, Urbanski and others within MVVA have, for many years, contributed a great deal of rigor to the intellectual conversation involving our profession through writing, lecturing and teaching. Their example of giving back to the profession - and to ASLA - and striving to ensure excellence in the next generation of landscape architects is something that should be rewarded as well.

Is it because of all these reasons that I eagerly nominate Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates for the ASLA Landscape Architecture Firm Award, and ask that you recognize the firm's unique and substantial contributions to our profession.

Sincerely,



Mark H. Hough, FASLA  
University Landscape Architect

**Michael Van Valkenburgh, FASLA**  
President and CEO

Michael's leadership of MVVA is an extension of his passion for landscape as a living artistic medium that deepens and enriches people's lives through the confluence of aesthetics, technology, and ecology. Having spent his adult life in Boston and New York, he has combined his love of cities and the energy of urban living with the lessons of his childhood on a dairy farm in rural New York State, where economy of means was prioritized.



Michael earned a Bachelor of Science in Landscape Architecture from Cornell University's College of Agriculture and a Master of Fine Arts in Landscape Architecture from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. His personal and educational background creates a foundation for his integrative approach to design, which finds inspiration in the pragmatics of science while aspiring to the highest levels of artistic expression and social purpose. Michael oversees a wide range of projects in both the Cambridge and New York offices, where he promotes collaboration and discovery through his inclusive working style.

Currently the Charles Eliot Professor in Practice of Landscape Architecture at Harvard's Graduate School of Design, Michael teaches landscape design as well as the use of plants as design material, synthesizing a broad range of influences into a comprehensive and balanced curriculum. He is a registered landscape architect in more than 25 states and in Canada, and is a Fellow of the American Academy in Rome and the American Society of Landscape Architects.

Michael received the National Design Award in Environmental Design from the Smithsonian Institution's Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum in 2003. MVVA's design for Brooklyn Bridge Park was awarded the prestigious Brendan Gill Prize from the Municipal Art Society of New York, having been selected as the work of art in 2010 that best exemplifies and contributes to the vibrant life of New York City. Michael was named the 2010 recipient of the Arnold W. Brunner Memorial Prize in Architecture from the American Academy of Arts and Letters for contributions to the practice of architecture as an art, making him, after Dan Kiley, only the second landscape architect to be honored in the award's 45-year history. In 2011, Michael was the recipient of the ASLA Design Medal, and he was a speaker at the MoMA's "Second Wave of Modernism" conference in late November.

*Michael's teaching revolutionized how we teach design with plants to landscape architects. He pushed against orthodoxy with great focus and personal zeal, as he still does. I see the Van Valkenburgh firm today, pushing hard against orthodox practice, on all fronts, in larger and more complex ways. They're doing it with some of the very best commissions in the US. In a world where increasingly bewildering politics and economic circumstances bring constant challenges to practice, their successes are helping us all.*

Gary Hilderbrand FASLA, Principal  
Reed | Hilderbrand

Laura Solano, ASLA  
Principal, Cambridge Office

Laura is widely regarded as an expert in the field of landscape technology and sustainability and her leadership and knowledge inform the design, construction, and post-construction maintenance of MVVA's projects.

Her particular areas of expertise include the integration of biological management programs in planting design, the use of sustainable soils, and the utilization of all landscape materials. In collaboration with Matt Urbanski and Michael Van Valkenburgh, Laura serves as a managing principal for planning and design projects from their earliest phases and oversees the technical aspects of MVVA's landscapes firm-wide.



As part of her professional advocacy, Laura lectures on technical innovations developed through the work of MVVA, highlighting the potential for creative overlap between landscape technology and landscape design. Laura teaches classes in landscape technology at Harvard University's Graduate School of Design, where she has been a lecturer for 20 years. Laura was a Resource Team Member for Soils in the development of the Sustainable Sites Initiative undertaken by the ASLA, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center and U.S. Botanical Garden. She has been a reviewer for the Soils chapter of the forthcoming Sustainable Sites Initiative Handbook and for Philip and Timothy Cral's book entitled Soil Design Protocols for Landscape Architects. She has served on multiple design and awards juries for professional design societies and private institutions. Laura has participated in the Mayor's Institute on City Design in Charleston, SC and has worked with former Mayor Kathleen Taylor in Tulsa, Oklahoma to complete an urban design case study for repurposing the Evans-Fintube Brownfield site. Laura received the Boston Society of Architects Women in Design Award of Excellence and was featured in Leaders in the Field: Women in Landscape Architecture, a film by Julie Gawendo and Izabela Riano. She is the Vice President of Finance for the Landscape Architecture Foundation. Laura contributed an article about soil to the University of Pennsylvania's Scenario Zine.

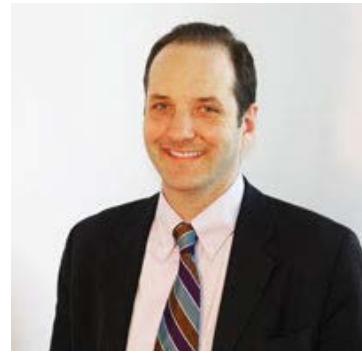
Laura received her Bachelor of Landscape Architecture from Ohio State University in 1983. Her undergraduate studies in botany at the University of Maryland helped inform her comprehensive and science-based approach to sustainable landscape practices. Laura is a licensed landscape architect in Massachusetts, Louisiana, Ohio, and Pennsylvania.

*MVVA's generosity of service, resources, and intellectual capital to LAF have advanced the organization, supported young leaders in the profession, contributed to a growing and innovative body of knowledge for sustainability, and been fun too. As a fundraiser for LAF, members of Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates volunteered their time to give a private tour of MVVA's legacy projects in New York. Two young landscape architects won this extraordinary trip-of-a-lifetime which generated resources for LAF and showed MVVA's passion for creating places that matter.*

Barbara Deutsch FASLA, Executive Director  
Landscape Architecture Foundation

**Matthew Urbanski, ASLA**  
**Principal, New York City Office**

Matthew is a Principal of MVVA where he has worked for over two decades. Along with Michael and Laura, he has been part of the project leadership for almost every major project the firm has completed. He has planned and designed landscapes in the United States, Canada, and France, including waterfronts, parks, college campuses, sculpture gardens, and private gardens. Collaborating with Michael Van Valkenburgh, he was a lead designer of Brooklyn Bridge Park in Brooklyn, New York, Segment 5 of Hudson River Park in New York City, Alumnae Valley at Wellesley College in Wellesley, Massachusetts, Allegheny Riverfront Park in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Teardrop Park in New York City.



Matthew began his career at MVVA working on both small gardens and larger projects, most notably Mill Race Park in Columbus, Indiana. He frequently uses plantings in dramatic ways that create a distinctive complement to an urban or architectural context. Michael and Matthew have coined the term “hypernature” to describe this aspect of their work. Examples of hypernature include the use of birches and meadow plantings in the General Mills entry garden (now destroyed) and the diverse-ly planted hedgerows at Brooklyn Bridge Park.

Matthew is an Adjunct Associate Professor in Landscape Architecture at Harvard’s Graduate School of Design. He has previously served as a Lecturer in Landscape Architecture at the GSD, teaching courses on horticulture, plants, and ecology.

lectures frequently on the expanding role of landscape architecture in urban design and the emerging recognition of parks as the engines of the livable city. In a peer-reviewed paper entitled “Do Landscape Architects Make the Best Urban Designers?” that he delivered at the 2009 “Landscape – Great Idea” X-L.Arch III conference in Vienna, Matthew laid out the concept of “landscape imagination” that he feels differentiates the urban design work of MVVA from traditional urban planning. While traditional urban planners have difficulty in moving beyond “the well-intentioned infusion of undifferentiated green spaces,” Matthew argued, specific landscape uses need to be anticipated in an urban plan in order to lay the groundwork for success.

In addition to his work as a designer, Matthew is a lecturer at Harvard’s Graduate School of Design and is co-owner of Red Hill Nursery, a plants nursery in New Jersey that specializes in diverse species, varieties, and forms that are not commonly available in large commercial nurseries. Matthew attended Albright College and graduated with a Bachelor of Science with a major in biology. He studied horticulture at the Delaware Valley College of Science and Agriculture and then attended Harvard’s Graduate School of Design, receiving a Master of Landscape Architecture. He is a licensed landscape architect in Massachusetts.

**A. Paul Seck**  
Principal, New York Office

Paul is a principal and runs the MVVA New York office. He provides leadership in project management throughout all phases of the design process. He is widely recognized for his expertise in the relationship between urban design and natural systems, and he has created groundbreaking landscape solutions in the treatment of surface water, including a significant role in the award-winning Connecticut Water Treatment Facility landscape.



Since 2003, Paul has served as senior project manager for the \$350 million Brooklyn Bridge Park, a project that presents unique site conditions and requires more than 40 sub-consultants. He has also been a senior project manager and a member of the design team for North Grant Park in Chicago and the Brooklyn Botanic Garden Water Recirculation project, which involved a significant redesign of the entire south garden and the creation of a new children's entrance on Flatbush Avenue, Brooklyn.

Paul was a 2003 Fellow in Landscape Architecture at the prestigious American Academy in Rome, where he lived for a year and studied the craft of landscape architecture. He received his Bachelor's degree in Landscape Architecture and City and Regional Planning from Ohio State, and he is a licensed landscape architect in the state of Massachusetts.



**Gullivar Shepard**  
Principal, New York Office

Gullivar is a principal and a guiding force at MVVA, steering the direction of many of the firm's largest projects. His training as an architect brings a strategic perspective to complex MVVA projects including Brooklyn Bridge Park, Javits Plaza, in New York City, the Lower Don Lands in Toronto, and Penn Park at the University of Pennsylvania. Gullivar led the planning and design effort for the White House's Pennsylvania Avenue project, the Princeton University Landscape Master Plan, Harbourfront Cultural Arts Centre on Toronto's waterfront, and most recently the redevelopment of the grounds surrounding the Gateway Arch in St. Louis, MO. He has also helmed many of the firm's winning and finalist entries in international design competitions such as the High Line in New York City and the Waller Creek and Chain of Parks in Austin, TX.

Gullivar earned a Bachelor of Arts in Architecture from Washington University in St. Louis. He received a Master of Architecture from Harvard's Graduate School of Design, graduating with distinction. Gullivar was awarded the Araldo Cossutta Annual Prize for Design Excellence. He is presently completing his registration as a professional landscape architect.

## Select Awards and Recognition

**2015**

ASLA Honor Award for Residential Design, Brooklyn Oasis, Willow Street Garden

**2014**

ASLA Honor Award for General Design, Segment 5 of Brooklyn Bridge Park

ASLA Honor Award for Research, Exhuming the Modern: The Lost Bench of James C. Rose

ASLA Honor Award for Communications, Monk's Garden

The American Planning Association's National Planning Excellence Award for Urbn Design, Brooklyn Bridge Park

The Globe and Mail's Best of the Year in Architecture award , Corktown Common

**2013**

ASLA New York Honor Award , Brooklyn Bridge Park Pier 1

**2012**

Public Design Commission of the City of New York's 2012 Award for Excellence, Brooklyn Botanic Garden, Brooklyn, NY

**2011**

Municipal Art Society of New York Brendan Gill Prize, Brooklyn Bridge Park Master Plan, Brooklyn, NY

AIANY Urban Design Honor Award, Brooklyn Bridge Park Master Plan, Brooklyn, NY

Rudy Bruner Award Silver Medal, Brooklyn Bridge Park Master Plan, Brooklyn, NY

Building Brooklyn Award - Open Space Category, Brooklyn Bridge Park Pier 1, Brooklyn, NY

ASLA Design Medal for Michael Van Valkenburgh

**MICHAEL  
VAN  
VALKENBURGH  
ASSOCIATES  
INC**



Ontario Professional Planners Institute Excellence in Planning Award, Lower Don Lands, Toronto, Ontario

**2010**

ASLA Honor Award for General Design, CT Water Treatment Facility, New Haven, CT

American Academy of Arts and Letters Arnold W. Brunner Memorial Award in Architecture

Institute of Transportation Engineers Transportation Achievement Award, Lower Don Lands, Toronto, Ontario

National Park Service (NPS) "Designing the Parks" Honor Award for Teardrop Park, Teardrop Park, New York, NY

**2009**

ASLA Honor Award for Analysis and Planning, Brooklyn Bridge Park Master Plan, Brooklyn, NY

ASLA Honor Award for General Design, Teardrop Park, New York, NY

BEX International Award for Best Futuristic Design, Lower Don Lands, Toronto, Ontario

Waterfront Plan Honor Award, the Waterfront Center's Excellence on the Waterfront Awards, for Brooklyn Bridge Park, Brooklyn Bridge Park, Brooklyn, NY

**2008**

ASLA Honor Award for General Design, Boston Children's Museum, Boston, MA

Building Stone Institute Tucker Design Award, Bailey Plaza, Ithaca, NY

ASLA Honor Award for Residential Design, Residence on Horseshoe Lake, Stoneham, ME



Royal Architectural Institute of Canada Special Jury Award for Sustainable Design, Lower Don Lands, Toronto, Ontario

ASLA Honor Award for Analysis and Planning, Lower Don Lands Master Plan, Toronto, Ontario

**2007**

New York ASLA Design Honor Award, Brooklyn Bridge Park, Brooklyn, NY

New York ASLA Design Honor Award, ASLA Green Roof, Washington, DC

Toronto Urban Design Award, City of Toronto, for the Competition Design of the Lower Don Lands: Urban Estuary, Lower Don Lands, Toronto, ON, Canada



**2006**

ASLA Design Award of Excellence, Alumnae Valley Restoration, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA

ASLA Honor Award for General Design, Tahari Courtyards, Millburn, NJ

**2005**

ASLA Honor Award for General Design, Herman Miller Factory Landscape, Cherokee County, GA

**2004**

ASLA Honor Award for General Design, Garden on Turtle Creek, Dallas, TX

**2003**

National Design Award from the Smithsonian Institution's Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum for Environmental Design

**2002**

EDRA/Places Place-Making Award, Allegheny Riverfront Park, Pittsburgh, PA

ASLA Design Honor Award, Allegheny Riverfront Park, Pittsburgh, PA



ASLA Design Merit Award, Spider Island, Chicago, IL

**1999**

ASLA Planning and Analysis Merit Award, Wellesley College Master Plan, Wellesley, MA



**1998**

ASLA Design Merit Award, Vera List Courtyard, New York, NY

**1997**

Progressive Architecture Awards Citation, Allegheny Riverfront Park, Pittsburgh, PA

**1995**

Boston Society of Landscape Architects Merit Award, 50 Avenue Montaigne, Paris, France

**1994**

ASLA Design Merit Award, Mill Race Park, Columbus, IN

National Trust for Historic Preservation Honor Award, Harvard Yard Restoration, Cambridge, MA

**1993**

Boston Society of Landscape Architects Honor Award, Mill Race Park, Columbus, IN

ASLA Planning & Urban Design Merit Award, Harvard Yard Restoration, Cambridge, MA



**1990**

ASLA Design Merit Award, Black Granite Garden, Los Angeles, CA

**1989**

ASLA Design Honor Award, Regis Gardens, Minneapolis, MN



**CITY ARCH RIVER PROJECT AT THE  
JEFFERSON NATIONAL EXPANSION  
MEMORIAL**  
St. Louis, MO (2010–ongoing)



HISTORIC LANDSCAPE

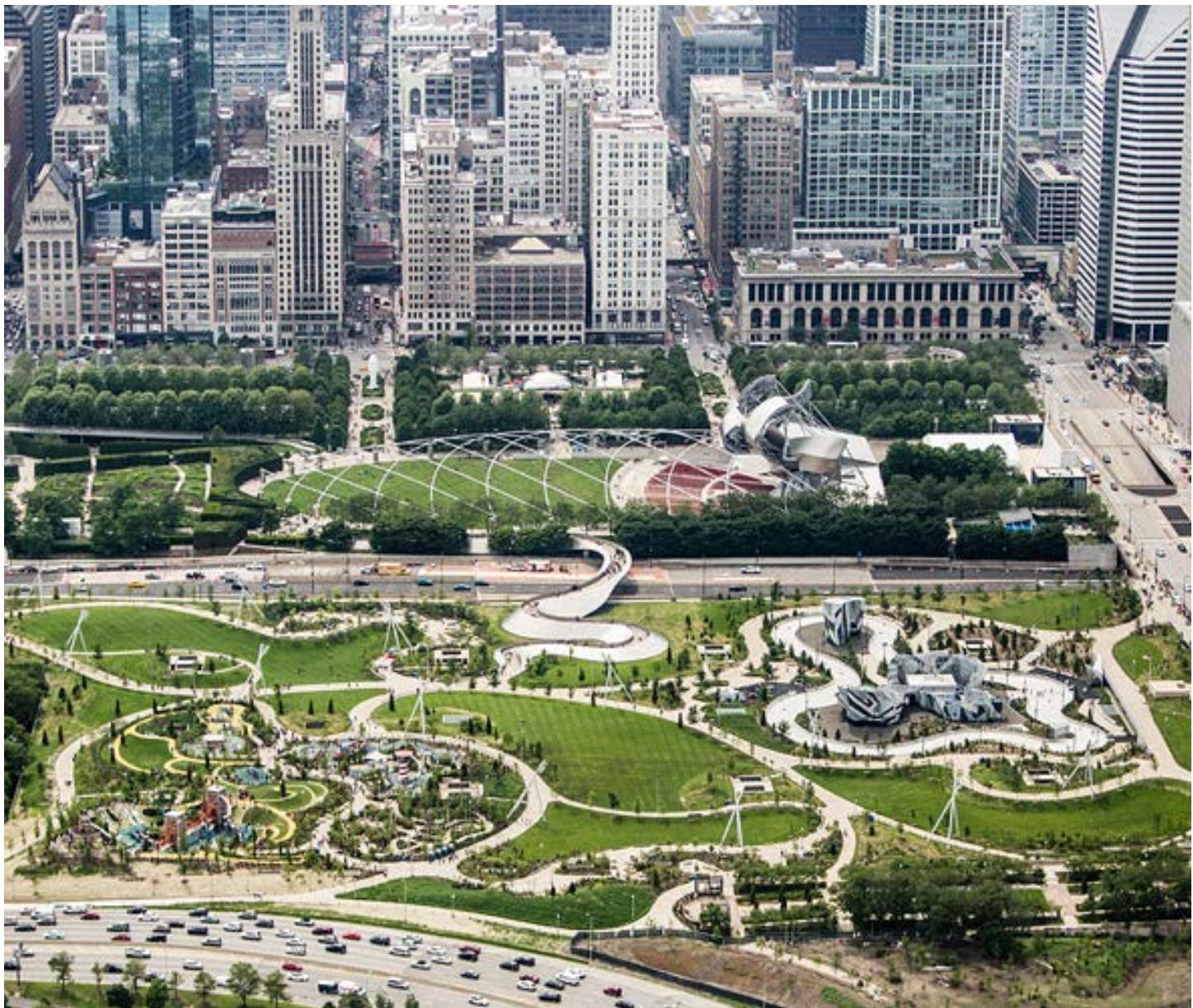


**BROOKLYN BRIDGE PARK**  
**Brooklyn, NY (2003–ongoing)**

*As a member of the construction management team on several MVVA projects including Teardrop Park and Hudson Park & Boulevard I can attest to their ingenuity, creativity and knowledge of the built landscape. Through their extensive research they understand what they are asking of the design and those that construct their vision.*

Annette P. Wilkus FASLA, Principal  
SiteWorks Landscape Architecture





### MAGGIE DALEY PARK Chicago, IL (2010–2015)

*Maggie Daley Playground not only brings new life to the Chicago waterfront parks it provides a creative and inspiring new world of play to the city for children of all ages. This design breaks the boundaries of traditional playgrounds and redefines the meaning of “play”. The park draws people into its mystique and adventure - a quality that has been evident on so many of MVVA’s playground designs.*

Jennifer L. Nitzky, PLA, ASLA,  
Associate  
Robert A. M. Stern Architects

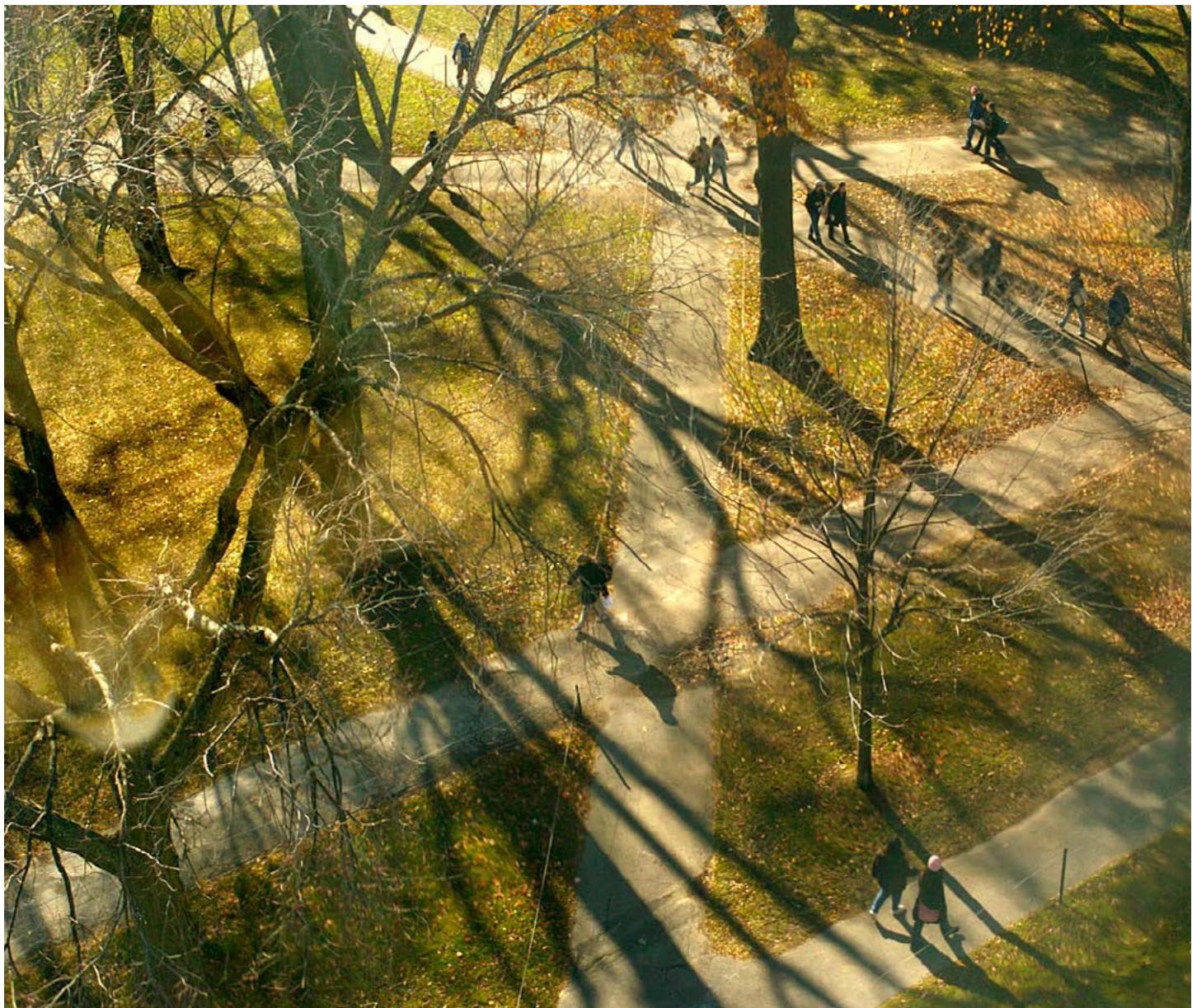


**G.W. BUSH PRESIDENTIAL CENTER**  
**Dallas, TX (2008–2013)**



*Many years ago this site would have been a breathtaking Texas prairie. Today the park is planted once again with native habitat for birds, butterflies and other wildlife. Visitors can experience this site's beautiful natural environment in the center of Dallas.*

Mrs. Laura Bush



**HARVARD YARD RESTORATION**  
**Cambridge, MA (1993–2009)**

Winner of a 1994 Honor Award for  
Excellence in Historic Preservation  
from the National Trust

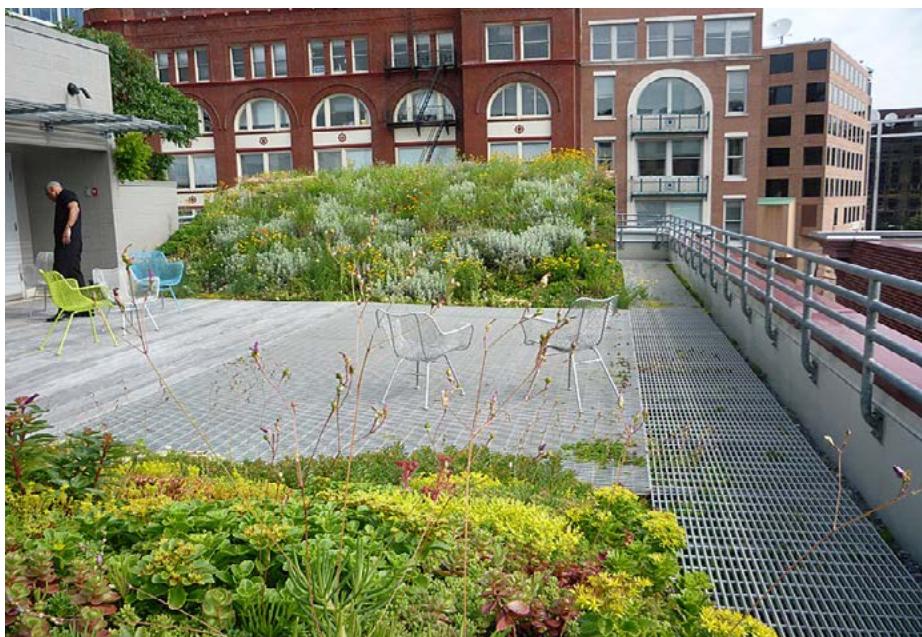


**TEARDROP PARK**  
**New York, NY (1999–2006)**



*A true urban oasis. The landscape architect has made a very bold gesture on an almost impossible site. It offers intimacy, which is tough for a public park, and takes your mind away from the city and surrounding buildings. It works for all ages.*

2009 ASLA Professional Awards Jury



**ASLA GREEN ROOF**  
**Washington, DC (2005–2006)**

*In a small space, with a modest budget, a new kind of green roof here is so inventive it changes the way you think about what a roof can be.*

Robert Campbell  
*Boston Globe*

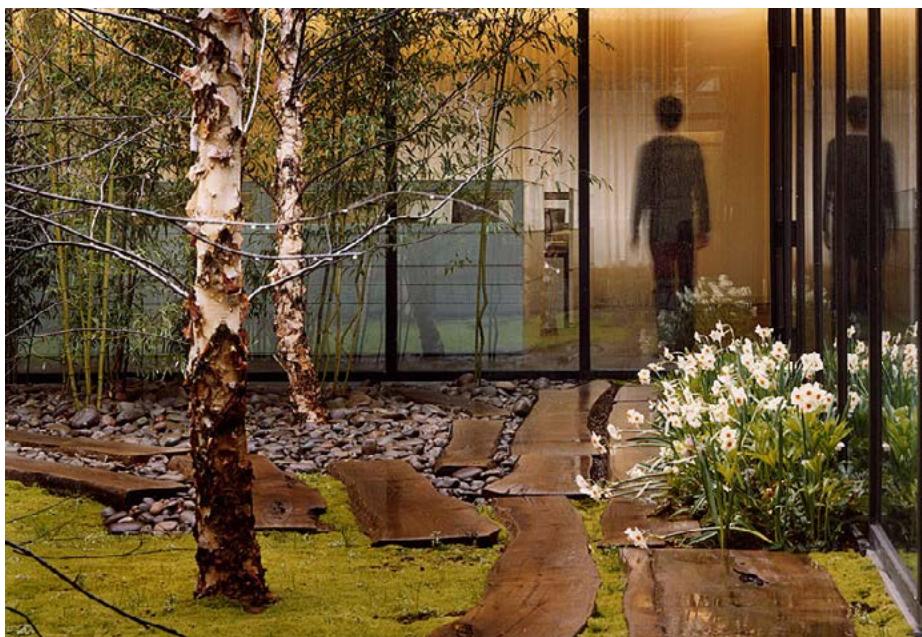


**CT WATER TREATMENT FACILITY**  
**New Haven, CT (2001–2005)**

*Exquisitely executed. Drawing the public into a treatment site and understanding the workings is strong. It is a great project concerning interaction of the architecture and landscape architecture, including the aesthetic. You can read the story of cleansing. The formal landscape design resolution is more compelling. It has a model railway quality for me. It is very sculptural in a highly urban area. I didn't think of the educational element because the quality is so beautiful.*

2010 ASLA Professional Awards Jury





**TAHARI COURTYARDS**  
Millburn, NJ (2002–2003)

*What a beautiful surprise for employees and visitors to this building. Exquisite work.*

2006 ASLA Professional Awards Jury



**HERMAN MILLER LANDSCAPE**  
Cherokee Co, GA (1997–2001)

